

A Concern for the Poster Blight in our Cities: A Study Example of Lagosmetropolis

O. Wole Oloidi and A. O. Edede

Abstract

The development of poster has a technologicallink with the art of printmaking, precisely lithography. The rationale for posters, as signs, stands as complementary means to provide and to pass on information across to the people. The purpose of signs is to communicate, educate and create awareness tocitizens. Social habits usually political, religious andcommercialare implicated in the prevalence of posters in our environment in recent times.Posters now contribute to high visual noise in ways that have never been before. However, the worry is how to get the right message to the people (consumers and theaudience) without creatingacommon hazard.Poster clusters in our towns and cities demand analternativeon how they could serve the purpose of disseminating information without defacing both our street furniture and the aesthetics of the environment. Unfortunately, rather than being a channel of information and communication, posters had turned out to de-aestheticize our towns and cities. This paper evaluates the impact of the poster blight and prefers alternatives how this menacecouldbe controlled. The approach to this paper is analyticalas it is evaluative. The objective invariably is to define measures to curb the poster blight and still retain the aesthetic values of our towns and cities? A new agenda is thus required to engage the public who use the postersto bring their messages to the public.

O. Wole Oloidi and A. O. Edede
Department of Fine and Applied Arts
Cross River University and Technology

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Introduction

Posters rank among the most vital instruments of advertisement in the society and widely used across the political religious academic and social barriers. Even though the rationale for poster-making and the uses is not for aesthetic but rather an information medium, there is need to define the poster aesthetics as well as explain and analyze the real value of the poster. Aesthetics, usually conceived as having a concern for beauty, implies an appreciation for the orderliness of things of the environment. In the above regard, it is unfortunate to see the state of Nigerian cities and towns defaced by the indiscriminate display of posters in different sizes and colours. Posters serve as means of communication targeted at the larger society at places where access to the information contained in them reach the audience. Posters are signs designed to create a positive impact on the public with the information in them. As message dissemination mechanisms, posters communicate to both young and old without stress to passers by.

Numerous definitions of posters abound, but considering the present circumstances, the definitions have to be channeled towards explaining the posters about their values and use in the daily life of the individual. The poster is a bill or placard that bears information for the target audience and usually located at points where pedestrians can benefit from the content and message contained. Posters also consist of large printed pictures, photographs or notices that one stick to a wall. The poster, therefore, is a piece of designed printed paper posted on a wall or any suitable surface where its targeted audience, usually pedestrians, come in contact with the information it contains. A poster serves a sole purpose of advertisement.

Posters are strategic to graphics, and visual communication design. Communications design calls on the competence in the processing of visual data aimed educating people. The rationale is to utilize and incorporate words or graphic images to convey information, ideas and feelings of the society. Graphics

communication products facilitate learning, entertainment, motivation, and commerce. Graphics communication includes the family of market segments thereby attracting the printing technologies alongside publishing, packaging, electronic imaging in addition to their allied industries. From a professional perspective, the poster falls into the category of graphic design unlike its origin in lithography referred to as the graphic art.

As described by Saunders (1979) the word poster (and chart) means different things to different people. Posters are of two types; these are the single-glance and the stop and study posters. These two categories can be explained by simply seeing the former as that which can be read and understood quickly without any spoken work, while the latter calls for looking at the variety of pictures and captions without the need for verbal explanation.

In communication, Pearce (1984) analyzed three important audiences that the poster impacts on. These are the rapidly growing number of persons; the second group is eclectic and intellectually alive public while the third is made up of those with a professional interest in communication. Nwankwo and Afolabi (2008) explain communication in two different components; viz, the verbal and the visual communication platforms. Further to the above categorization, verbal communication involves what is said or written, while visual communication includes the use of visual images (artwork) to convey specific ideas and messages for which posters is one of those details. Janora and Altshuler (2006) say that the pleasure beauty inspires in us is called an aesthetic feeling. The use of posters is not a new invention. Posters have always been used both for religious and political purposes. Amifor (2009) says that during the 1989 elections, Crown posters, a primary mode of free communication featured considerably for positioning both the party flag-bearers as well as their candidates.

Types of Posters

There are different types of posters as far as graphic communication is concerned. The most prominent among these are a retro poster, pinup poster, vintage design poster, typography poster, movie poster, innovative poster and religious poster. All these fall under the religious,

political, administrative, commercial, and academic spheres. Each of these is meant so to say “speak” to the passer-by non-verbally. But are these posters displayed decently as it should be? The answer is NO!

Saving our cities from defacement

Where and how these posters are displayed, constitute a lot of worrisome concern about the environment. Nearly all sectors of the society are guilty of this indecent act whereby our environment is regularly assaulted with posters. A few examples are selected to show the extent of environmental poster abuse. Some examples of posters indecently displayed are shown for clarification and a brief evaluation of the nature of the problem they pose.

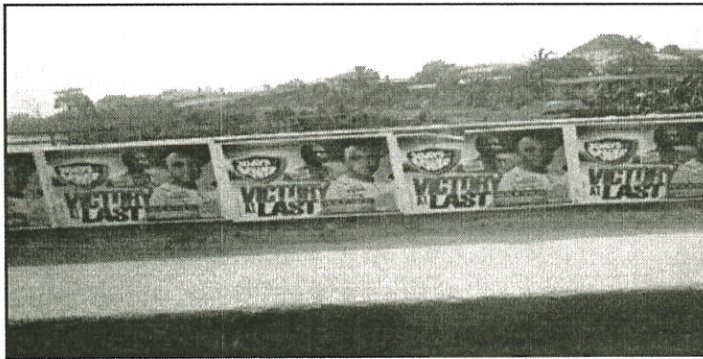


Fig 1: Religious posters on the bridge railings in Port Harcourt.

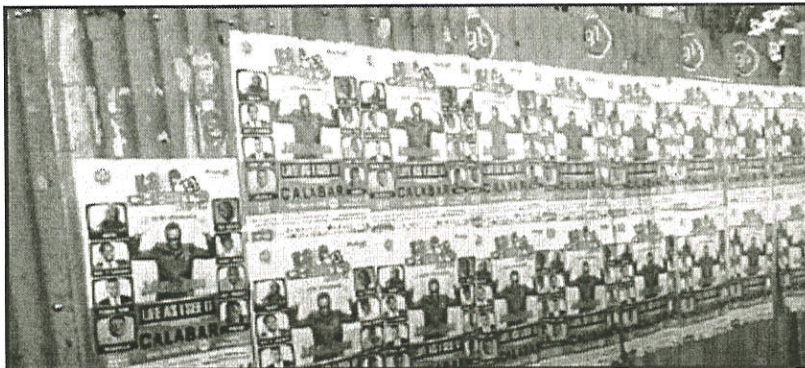


Fig 2: A tattered religious poster on display on the fence in Calabar.

The Political poster

This category of political posters has disturbing nuisance effect after every election, mere creating a political awareness, therefore, should be seen as a conscious act rather than defacing the streets with torn posters. Unfortunately, the politicians who are the custodians of democracy do not have it in their conscience that cleanliness is key to the democratic culture. Hoppers (1970) summarizes such clumsiness of vision by saying that by our actions, we not only influence other human beings but change the course of events in nature. The actions of these politicians and their errand persons have in diverse ways created a very negative impression in the minds of many. This is because, after the election, the posters are left on walls of buildings electric poles residential fences, grounded vehicles, the street corner and the roundabout and even on existing advertising billboards sponsored by other agencies. Timi Eyaen, an Environmentalist in an interview with the Leadership Newspaper, in his quest to rid the environment of distortions caused by the indiscriminate posting of posters and bills, said that “to have a clean country, there must be some piece of legislation regulating human activities in this regard.” It is apparent that the care of the environment has some laws on it. What essentially is apparent is the will to engage not just the spirit of the law but to actualize the demands of the law. Evidently, the need for environmental stewardship for which some roads are swept daily funded by government hints at an underlying essence that is defined by neatness and order. It then implies that trashes of all sorts that constitute hazards and are of nuisance value should usually be considered as removable waste.

The political class and the anti-democratic disposition that they display unabashedly include going around with thugs and errand boys who are violent and abusive. These political jobbers usually post such posters and watch over them till they serve their purpose. Considering such realities, environmental stewards would hardly dare to remove such posters because of personal safety.



Fig. 3: Torn posters on the wall of residential building in Lagos

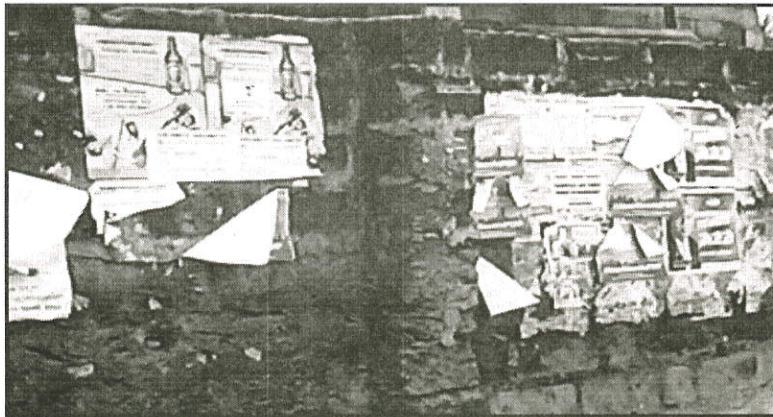


Fig. 4: Display of posters on the wall in Oshodi, Lagos

Commercial posters

The commercial poster includes the flier and the client/service delivery solicitor poster. This category of advertising posters competes for the faith-based and political posters one business concerns or location. Examples are: type your documents here; chicken and broilers for sale contact; the address below or phone number and many others. They usually are displayed anywhere without recourse to any sense of what is considered decent; even where “post no bill” is boldly written.

The Example of Lagos Metropolis

Take Lagos for instance, graffiti, banners and life-size posters of politicians are assorted on electricity poles, flyovers, and other public spaces as well as private properties; all these are turning the cities and towns into an eyesore. Ukpebor in an interview stresses the need to always emphasize the word 'control' in the way and manner the politicians and their agents display their posters. In 2006, the Lagos State government through the Lagos State Signage and Advertising Agency (LASAA) began a heavy clamp down on individuals, organizations, religious bodies and other private owned agencies who deface Lagos walls or buildings with posters in a bid to protect the environment. Many organizations and their agents are guilty of these unsightly acts or visual noise, Those in the corridors of power seem to be in the front line of indiscriminately posting of election campaign posters at street corners, walls, advertising billboards belonging to other institutions/agencies or every available space in our towns and cities.

The prevalence of election campaign posters on street walls, street light poles, pavements electrical poles, bridge sidewalks, residential buildings, office entrances and every other space. Although the owners of these posters may want to exonerate themselves from blame, it is important to know that they might not directly be involved in the defacement of towns and cities. However, they may not claim complete innocence since these controversial posters bear their names and photographs and must have been cited by such aspirants politicians themselves' as explained by Ukpebor *This Day* of February 4, 2015

From the findings carried out on the poster display in our towns and cities, the purpose of posters appears to have been defeated. This is simply because what is decent has been neglected in the course of these indiscriminate posting of posters. Under normal circumstances, art is life and life itself is aesthetically motivated by the preferences we make considering things which are inviting, appealing and sustaining. Once there is a derailment in any of the matters mentioned, then whatever may be the rationale for poster display cannot be rooted in decency. The accompanying indecent display of posters attests to the fact that something speedily needs

to be done before the environment is severely undermined. Although posters are the fastest and widely used communication tool, it has both verbal and nonverbal aspects by way of accommodating visuals as pictures or illustrations as well as the text dimensions that provide illuminations to the images. However, considering the way posters are displayed without recourse for order and decency their essences or purpose always have been defeated. Considering that posters are adapted to environments where pedestrians have the leisure to stand a while to glean the information it contains, but, some spaces where these posters are often posted like on the streets, roundabouts, existing billboards, etc., is evidently worrisome. Posters can be items of environmental decoration and beautification that enhance the aesthetic dimensions of a place. It is unfortunate, therefore, that a cultural item of value such as the poster regularly trampled upon in the way already analysed in this paper requires redemption. We may then ask what the municipal authorities are doing? It is their responsibility to effect an ordered environment for society. Environmental education becomes of prime value in the society where a sense of order and the significance of the poster repeatedly eludes consciousness. Such education should be comprehensive and encompass the community as a whole. Where environmental education of this nature gets engaged, a metropolis like Lagos or Calabar which is a tourism state hosting many visitors ought not to witness an ugly display of posters most of which get quickly defaced after being beaten by rain, thereby initiating unwarranted visual noise or pollution. In an interview with Mr. Ayoola Akingbohun who spoke with *This Day Newspaper*, expressed his displeasure at the constant pasting of posters on his property that has caused reasonable damage to its look. According to him, he woke up one morning to find election posters pasted all over the walls of his house, and he went further to say that it was not long ago that vast sums of money were spent to repaint the house. Practices like the above occur every so often defines the city and townscapes. Practices of the kind focused here have legal implications largely ignored by all and sundry. Invariably, a combination of environmental education and concern for the protection of municipal laws are required to

tame the indecent and indiscriminate posting of posters in ways and manner that disregard the ethics of environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

Everybody may not be able to afford the television and radio for advertisement. In essence, the use of poster to carry out the day-to-day activities remain a welcome alternative to information dissemination. Unfortunately, this open attitude of posting posters without regard for its nuisance worth when the laws of decency and frugality get disobeyed flagrantly there becomes a need to canvass the need for poster dissemination permit. The way posters litter private and public spaces without regard for environmental harmony and order in instances where they become wallpapers as often noticed in the cluster of a particular poster constitute a lot of environmental embarrassment to a supposed culture of beauty and order. It is high time Nigeria prepared herself toward emulating the standard of decency in other climes. To cultivate an unspoiled, clean and decent habit with regards to interacting with the environment accords a polity a sense of dignity and worth. Any portrayal of the meaning of disorder dehumanizes. Unfortunately, most times, local, state and federal government agents who ought to campaign against indiscipline of this kind usually get implicated in the acts of which they impose sanctions. In other words, the people at the helm of affairs, by this, the policy makers who enact or protect the laws, unfortunately, are the ones guilty of defacing our environment with posters. Most damaging is the way and manner with which the politicians use their boys to destroy good-looking architectural structures without taking into cognizance the adverse effects of this unpatriotic act both on the buildings and the environment as a whole. Considering the contention of this paper, that is, the need to develop the culture of environmental stewardship a few recommendations require adoption and implementation. To deploy posters on walls, electric poles, fences billboards, roundabouts, bridges, and culverts, abandoned vehicles to mention, but a few should be discouraged. There are laws designed to protect the environment from abuses arising from assaults on it. Such laws require revival such that due penalty should be meted on whosoever

contravenes the laws. The environmental laws should be enforced to bring erring members of the public to justice. Until the act of lawlessness are discouraged, and persons face sanctions for defacing the environment no matter what anybody does, there probably would be an unending confrontation with this environmental scourge. Moreover, posters should be displaced in areas specified by the Environmental Protection Agency. If at all there is need to engage the posters because of its strategic value, efforts should be made to remove them before they constitute an eye saw or environmental discomfort. Events have a time frame of actualizing them. Hence it is also expedient to be conscious of when to remove the poster after the event it addresses have expired. Environmental and civic education is also important to inculcate some discipline towards the poster culture and its value and abuses. Posters should never be displayed on the residential buildings or billboards for which they are not designed including other open information infrastructure, roundabouts, fences, electric poles, and any other unauthorized places as the case may be.

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